

Cadorna's Error as Seen by Swiss Critic

Failure to Provide Defence Lines and to Guard Against Teuton Surprise, Two Important Factors Neglected by Italian Commanders

By LIEUT.-COL. C. FREY,

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I ASSUME the reader knows that the piercing movement on the Isonzo had been prepared by adding the German army of Von Below to the Austrian forces and placing it between Karfreit and Anza, ready to attack. At the same time the Entente was deceived as much as possible as to the coming drive against Italy.

How far Cadorna and his sub-leaders were kept in the dark is beyond my knowledge, but one thing is certain: the surprise was successful, and to parry a similar one in the future can hardly be accomplished by a War Council. It could be done only by a generalissimo, if at all. However, it is just as certain the Entente knew of the movements of troops, for one could read about them in their newspapers.

It was especially interesting to us at the headquarters of the high command to view the whole Isonzo front from both sides, a chance that came to us for the first time.

From Monte Quarin, near Cormons, formerly Cadorna's fighting position, we could see, when the weather was cold but bright, from the mouth of the Isonzo, where it empties into the sea, to the mountains east of Feitsch and fix every height without the aid of glasses. While the Doberdo plateau, according to our standards, rises at an easy grade, the plateau of Bainsizza with its corner pillar, the Monte St. Gabriele, with Monte Santo, the Kuk und Vrh, up to the north summit of the Gabriele already occupied by the Italians, makes a very respectable impression.

Starting from the Isonzo, deeply cut into the rocks, whose beautiful green water can be seen flowing its winding way, the Italians had to overcome steep cliffs 600 meters high. We could recognize from close proximity all stages of their fights during the eleven first Isonzo battles by the lines they reached at the time and fortified immediately.

Wherever there was fighting the soil looks like a desert. There are only few trees that were not splintered or swept away down to the roots. This is especially true of the battles in the saddle between the Monte Santo and Gabriele, up which the Italians intended to roll from the north side, as we know. Evidently this north side was covered by a flanking fire of the Austrians, for the attackers' progress here was very slow.

The village of Dol is almost levelled to the ground. Everywhere you see holes in the rocks, where the Italians were seeking refuge for themselves and their ammunition. It must have been a very hard fight. For days they had to do without succor and were unable to send back for supplies, and they deserve great credit for what they did, even if they were

Junk Ships Valuable.

THE experience early in the war of a New Haven man selling for \$163,000 an old ship he had bought as junk for \$18,000 has been duplicated to a certain extent in all parts of the world in the last three years.

Recently a ship owner of Gothenburg, Sweden, received an offer of a bark at 380,000 kroner (\$105,555, par). Believing the description fitted a vessel he once owned, he investigated and found that the bark was the same one he had sold in March, 1914, for 26,000 kroner.

Competition for the Chinese cruiser Ching Sing among Japanese merchants showed the scarcity of tonnage in the Far East and the efforts being made by the Japanese to build up their fleets. It had been the intention of the Chinese Minister of the Navy to sell the ship for \$100,000. Bids immediately raised the price to \$140,000. A British merchant then offered \$180,000 and promised to give the Minister a "present" of \$40,000. Hearing of this, the Japanese firm of Mitsui Bussai put in a bid of \$240,000. This was followed by a bid from another Japanese named Fujita, who offered \$250,000, of which the Chinese Government was to get \$190,000, the rest to be divided in "presents" in the Flowery Republic.

greatly superior in numbers. In the rocks of the Karst, on the Deberdo plateau, there were ideal trenches, blasted very deep and finished with masonry, affording shelter for men and munitions. Only Italian masons could accomplish this.

For the twelfth Isonzo battle, for which the initiative was to come from Cadorna, it had evidently been planned to occupy the whole of the Bainsizza plateau, to flank the Wippach Valley from the north, then to roll up the Austrian Karst position between Wippach and Kostanjevica and make for Trieste. Already Trieste was within firing distance of the big Italian mortars and Cadorna hoped he would be able to crown his successes of tenacity, paid for by streams of blood, by smashing his way through. For this purpose he had drawn his general reserve from the camps which we also could see, and it is said started them in the direction of the Bainsizza plateau.

At this moment the counter blow, well prepared by the Germans and Austrians, struck him and now, after having seen the lay of the land from both sides, I shall attempt to explain the Italian catastrophe, without taking into consideration the excuse that Cadorna had not had time to bring his general reserves into play.

A staff officer attached to the staff of the high command said to me at one time, and he had some grounds for his assertion: "The operative plan is nothing compared with the thoroughgoing preparation for such action by the sub-leaders." And still I should like to add the operative idea comes first. It was as follows:

The strong Italian Isonzo army occupying the sector from the sea across the plateau of Kostanjevica (the Karst) up to the Monte Santo and Kuk was to be manoeuvred out by a piercing attack upon

Cividale. It is true in the sector Flitsch-Tolmino-Anza the Italians were only about even as to numbers compared with their attackers and preparations for a possible reverse were insufficient, but the mountain summit of Monte Sabotino, whose rocky sides form an almost perpendicular incline of 500 meters down to the bed of the Isonzo, from the Matajur, 1,643 meters, to the Rombon, 2,208 meters, was so strongly fortified by nature the Italians could only be defeated by a surprise.

Of course the surprise was made possible by the fact that nothing had been done to provide against an attack except in the lines (about seven trenches deep) that had been prepared for defence again and again, while the attack was proceeding. And this was not the fault of the Roma brigade, &c., condemned by Cadorna, but his own.

Yes, he had ordered the whole defence artillery, including that at the bridge-heads of Codroipo and Latisana, where the second catastrophe took place, forward to the attack. There was no second or third position behind those weak trench lines. And even along the roads of invasion there were no fortified points to act as barriers. Such can be seen in the Venetian plains only, where they were built before the war or at the beginning of it.

Only by a personal observation one is able to appreciate the difficulty of lining up troops on such terrain for attack within reach of the enemy's artillery. Only thoroughness could succeed here.

From Karfreit to Canale the army of Von Below was augmented by Austro-Hungarian columns. At the sector Tolmino-Canale the troops were massed the strongest, for the blow from this line struck the road from Tolmino to Civi-

dale in the flank. One division even took the direction of Tolmino-Karfreit, disregarding the Italians who on October 24, the first day of attack, were still standing east of the Isonzo at this point and could have undertaken a flanking movement.

Another group, particularly strong, was the one that broke through along the deeply cut great road from Karfreit to Cividale, crossing over the Monte Mia at the left and the Matajur at the right. It takes a mountaineer five hours to climb the Monte Matajur. And this precipice was taken while shells were hailing.

It is true the fog was a help for the aggressor in this unequal combat. In addition to this the Italians and their leaders were stunned. Here the Italian sub-leadership failed as well as the weaker nerves. Of the latter I was assured by participants.

Even if their lines of communication had been interrupted and consequently the giving of orders could not proceed, the sub-leaders and troops should have known what to do and should have held their positions. By flanking attacks the broken columns of the aggressors perhaps could have been thrown back. But this was not done and evidently the reserves of the different sectors were swept away in panic.

However, Cadorna either did not have any reserves in the region of Cividale or they did not get into action. On the other hand, the sub-leaders of the aggressor, better trained in a war of motion, were assisting the strategic leadership by quick action on their own responsibility and by themselves kept in touch with the higher command.

Thus, indeed, strategy could utilize tactical successes and could proceed far beyond the original object aimed at. On the German-Austrian side the great thing was the operative idea. Next came tactics and preparedness by sub-leaders and then the morale of the troops, that is, the execution. The higher factor is always presupposed upon the next underlying one, and only when all these factors harmonize such a success is possible.

Cadorna's defeat is bound to compel a comparison with the battle of Cambrai. Whoever has seen the strong German position at that point, as I did, and pictures to himself the break to a depth of eight kilometres at the first onrush on the Isonzo the penetration was only three or four kilometres deep—must credit it to the absolutely cool, calm and capable leadership upon the German side that the English did not succeed in breaking through. Of course, more positions would have to have been smashed, but the surprise had been successful and in the case of Cadorna it weighs heavy in the scales that he was much stronger than the Germans at Cambrai.

Writers of the Future.

THERE is published in this town of publications innumerable a certain magazine for young folks. And in this magazine for children there is a department by children. This department, with its verses, stories and little essays, suggests the questions what the literature of America's future is to be and by whom it will be made. For it is with some readily supplied reservations quite presumable that the boys and girls who are writing to-day will be to-morrow the men and women who write.

Turning to the young folks' own page in a recent issue there is first a poem by Elizabeth A—, then a sketch by Elizabeth G—, next a boy contributor, Guy H—, followed by Lucie H—, Victoria S—, Janet S—, Genevra, Alice and another Elizabeth, Retina, Marian, Erward, Miriam and Jack.

But sixteen swallows do not make a drink. Here, then, is an honor roll with many names in it, and this is the way it begins: Helen, Margaret, Julia, Helen, Hope, Sylvia, Ruth, Katharine, Mary, Eleanor, Virginia, Lilian, Arletta, Margaret, Florence, Fred. Then three girls, boy; seven girls, boy; twenty-five girls, boy; eleven girls, boy, girl, three boys; four girls, boy; fifteen girls, boy, and so on. In the whole list of 121 names only fifteen are unmistakably those of boys.

The question may be turned over to the statisticians and the prophets, professional and amateur. Only the materials are supplied here.

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THE TRIPOD

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CIRCULATION: (DELETED BY CENSOR) SHOTS A MINUTE.

By MILTON V. SNYDER,

Paris Correspondent of THE SUN.

FRENCH newspapers, which have helped enliven the weary days of the French poilus at the front, now have an American contemporary. The *Tripod* has taken its place by the issue of its first number with *L'Echo de l'Argonne*, the dean of the poilu press; *Le Petit Echo*, of the Eighteenth Territorial Regiment; *L'Echo des Tranchées*; *L'Echo des Marmites*; *Le Poilu Enchaîné* and about 300 other little sheets that exhibit the good fellowship and wit of the fighting men.

This newcomer in the field, a facsimile of the upper part of the title page of which is reproduced here, was brought out by a former member of THE NEW YORK SUN staff who is now a high private in the American Expeditionary Forces. He doesn't want his name used, despite the entreaties of the censor that it be incorporated in this sketch. He is modest and bald headed, but further than this information he is not desirous of revealing any other details that would be likely to expose his identity to the world, the army and, last but not least, the censor.

The *Tripod* takes its name, not from the three legged companion of the engineer who adjusts his transit or level upon it when surveying; nor from the still more ancient stool upon which the Pythoness sat when she delivered her oracles, but from the mounting of the ordinary, common or garden, everyday machine gun of the modern army.

The *Tripod* announced in its first number that it expects to appear weekly and declares that its sole excuse for existence is that it hopes to amuse the members of the 101st Machine Gun Battalion, by whom and for whom it is edited.

The little *Tripod* has sixteen pages of two columns each. Its first article is a greeting of welcome.

"The *Tripod*," it says, "stands firm on its two front legs and its one hind leg, quickly carries its right hand to its right eyebrow, its fingers extended, its thumb carefully tucked in, salutes the officers and the men of the 101st Artillery, actually in service with the American Expeditionary Army. It hopes to serve them well as long as the weather, the censorship, travels, the treasurer and the enemy will permit."

The *Tripod* promises to have no particular policy: it says it has no other aim than to bring to its readers in France a breath of North America and to its readers left behind across the ocean a breath of France. In an editorial paragraph it thanks THE SUN Tobacco Fund for all present and future gifts of tobacco. It prints a satirical poem, to be sung by the Kaiser to the air of "Tipperary," in which the Emperor makes his farewells to the Wilhelmstrasse, to the Fatherland, and announces that he is off to St. Helena.

There is a historic-philosophical dissertation on the Boche. The *Tripod* tells through the pen of its "Berlin correspondent" how the commander of a German submarine sank an American ship loaded with Christmas tobacco for the soldiers, and of the mourning in the camps for that which came not. Poetry has its place in the paper in the "Thoughts of an Artilleryman in the Mud."

There is a course in French conversation. "Non" should be pronounced "Noh," with a slight adenoidal accent. As to the words "vin blanc" and "vin rouge," it is recommended that they should be used most sparingly. Not so with "merci," which is to be employed on every occasion.